

THE ^{11-38d}
INNOCENCY
^a OF ^{16 47 6 17}
ERROR

Asserted and Vindicated.

In a LETTER to -----.

By EUGENIUS PHILALETHES. (E.)

ie. A A Sykes

Humanum est errare.

Errare possum, Hæreticus esse nolo.



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. R O B E R T S, near the Oxford-
Arms in Warwick-Lane. 1715.

IN NOBIS

THE

OF

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE

THE



THE
INNOCENCY
OF
ERROR
Asserted and Vindicated.

S I R,



YOU express'd the other Day a great deal of Concern, not without some Mixture of Indignation, that I should assert and vindicate a Position, as you thought monstrous and detestable; viz. *No Heresy is so destructive of Religion as a wicked Life, no Schism so damnable as a Course of Sin.* I then urg'd some Arguments to you, which you owned contain'd in them a *Shew* at least of Reason, and an Air of Probability: But yet you were apprehensive, that I might have used some Art or Disguise in my Words, which then you could not see through so clearly; and therefore you desired me to lay my Reasons together, and give you an Opportunity of weighing them distinctly by your self. I here send them to you;

expecting only, and desiring a *sincere Love* of Truth, and a Readiness to embrace her, however negligently or inartificially dress'd up; assuring you from one who knew the worth of Truth and Wisdom, that *she is more precious than Rubies, and all the things that thou canst desire are not to be compared to her.*

Prov.
3. 15.

To evincethe Truth of the Assertion first in General, Let the Words be only considered, and the Thing will be evident. *Religion* is an habitual Disposition of the Mind to worship and to please God. Now 'tis plain that a Course of Sin is directly contrary to such a Temper; nay, 'tis a Contradiction to pretend to an *Habitual Disposition of Mind to please* God, and to act generally so as will *displease* him, *i. e.* to lead a wicked Life, or to live in a Course of Sin. Now if *Heresy* or *Schism* be not a *Contradiction* to an *Habitual Disposition of Mind to worship and to please God*, then I had good Ground to assert and vindicate the Position before laid down. By *Heresy* is meant usually, *An Error in Fundamentals*. Put the Case now of any *Heresy*, *Arianism* for Instance, which some pretend is reviving, or any other that you please. 'Tis very possible to be fully persuaded of the Rightness of their respective Notions, consistent with a hearty Zeal for the Honour and Worship of God: For where, I pray, is the Inconsistency? They *believe* in God, and *worship Him* with all the Devotion possible; you yourself cannot deny but that they might do it with as much Devotion as the Man that lives in a *Course of Sin*. They think themselves obliged to act according to the Rules which God has laid down;

down; which, if one may judge by the Sinners Practice, he doth not. They with Diligence and Industry search and endeavour to find out the Will of God, and steadily keep his Laws, which they understand the Purport of, which a *wicked* Liver never *strives* to do.

This you think may be allowed. *But the Arian or Socinian pays not the Honour or the Worship which he ought to the Son of God. And since no Religion can be acceptable, which is contrary to the Will of God, they that are guilty of such Crimes shall suffer.*

You know my Opinion so well on these Points, that I need not tell you, I neither vindicate nor approve of *the one or the other.* But yet the *Arian* and *Socinian* confines his Worship to God the Father: The Sinner pays it to neither Father, Son, nor Holy Ghost: The Heretick gives not so *compleat a Worship* as he *ought*: The Wicked Man gives *none.* And so much at least as 'tis better to pay some part of a Debt than none at all, so much is *Heresy* better than *Sin* and *Wickedness.*

The same Answer will justify the other part of the Assertion about *Schism.*

Thus much may suffice in General as to the Assertion: But because I would willingly go to the Bottom of this Question, and treat it with as much Care as I can; I'll endeavour to root up the Foundations of your Prejudices, by representing to you the *Innocency of Error.*

Error is the Assent of the Mind to a thing as true, which is not so. If this extend no farther than the Mind, 'tis what I call *Simple Error.*

If

If a Man proceeds upon this false Bottom to regulate his Practice, such Error is then call'd a Practical Error. How far this latter sort of Errors falls under the Cognizance of Man, or of a much higher Tribunal, that of God, will appear from the ensuing Discourse. In order to which 'tis clear, beyond Dispute, that Simple Errors are not, nor can be punishable.

First, Because in the Perceptions of the Mind Men are perfectly *Passive*; and our Perceptions of Things being in numberless Instances quite different from what things really are in themselves, unless we are capable of bringing together and comparing a great many intermediate Ideas to prove the contrary, we must *necessarily* be under abundance of *Errors*. Try to persuade a Countryman that the *Sun* is a great many times bigger than the *Earth*, or that it is a great many Thousand Miles distant from us, and he'll think you attempt only to make a Fool of him, and endeavour to persuade him out of his Senses. In these and Ten thousand such like Cases, Men are as *necessarily* under Errors, as they are *necessary* in their Perceptions. They cannot help continuing in Mistakes, for want of proper means to rectify them; and therefore are no more to blame for not removing them, than a Stone is to blame for moving when 'tis impell'd.

Secondly, If Simple Error be punishable, then where-ever there is Error, there is Guilt, and consequently *all Men* must be guilty before God on that Account. For where is the Man that doth not entertain some Errors either concerning things which really do exist, or in Deductions which

which he draws from them? Who is there that's so well vers'd in Nature, as to be Master of all her Mazes, and certain that he *knows*, I say, *knows* all her Secrets? Or who is there that ever *repented*, or *ask'd God's Pardon* for Mistakes of this Nature? And yet if Errors be *Criminal*, 'tis certain that all *Crimes unrepented* of are *Damnable*.

But 'tis allowed that a Man may be mistaken in things of this Nature, without any *Crime* or *Fault*. But where God has concerned himself in the Discovery of any Thing, there 'tis *Criminal* to *Err*, or to be ignorant.

This, tho' it may seem to carry a profound Respect for the Revelation of God, yet is plainly insufficient for the Purpose for which 'tis brought. For, 1st. Is any Man obliged to *know* or understand in the meaning which God intended every thing that is revealed? Is any Man obliged to have a distinct Knowledge of every Passage of the Scriptures, which unless he can attain to, he must necessarily be damned? Let him that thinks so, set about the Explication of the *Apocalypse*, or the old Prophets, and try if he'll be capable himself of doing what he thinks is required of others under Pain of Damnation. 2dly. 'Tis granted that 'tis a Crime not to believe what God has thought fit to reveal, supposing one knows that God has revealed it: But a Man may do this without a clear and distinct Understanding of the thing revealed. Suppose a Man should not understand who is meant by the *White Horse* in the *Revelations*, or what is the meaning of *being baptized for the Dead*, and such like; yet whilst he owns that God is the Author of these

these Passages, and is ready to believe them in the best manner he can get an Understanding of them, where can be his Crime? Why, is it not rational to conclude, that if God had design'd that we should have determined and adequate Ideas belonging to those Sounds, he would have so express'd himself, as that we should not mistake his Meaning? 3dly, If 'tis *Criminal* to *Err* in the Meaning of a Passage of Scripture, the Crime will not rest where we are apt to fix it, but will ascend to a Place where we dare not think of Guilt, even to God himself, who has deliver'd his Will in Terms that are *ambiguous*. 4thly, The Distinction here made use of between *Errors in things revealed*, and *Errors in other Matters*, proves directly, that *Error as Error* is not *Criminal*. For 'tis as much an Error to believe Heat in the Fire, as to call in question any *Theological Truth*. But I proceed.

Thirdly, If *Simple Error* be punishable by God, then 'tis the greatest *Cruelty*, *Injustice*, and *Tyranny* imaginable in him to make such Creatures as cannot but *Err* in many Cases, and yet to punish them for *Erring*. Our *Knowledge* is but of very narrow Extent, and confined to a very few things, the rest must be resolved into Opinion; and as there are innumerable Degrees of *Assent* from *Assurance* and *Confidence* down to *Distrust* and *Disbelief*, there may be as many Degrees of Errors. As this then is the Make and Frame of our Constitutions, 'twould be *Cruel* and *Unjust* in God to punish us for what we cannot help, to treat us as *Breakers* of his Laws, when we only want *Light*, which the *Father of Light* alone can give.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, If *Simple Errors* are punishable by God, 'tis not a few *Dissenters* in a Nation (tho' 'tis only these are struck at by the Abettors of such Unchristian Tenets) no, nor Tenthousand times ten thousand that must perish everlastingly, but the Flames of Hell will reach to almost, if not quite, all the Christian World. Let us look into the several Communities of Christians, and by an impartial View of their *professed* Tenets, see how by the Lump whole Nations must be damn'd, if *Errors* are damnable. The *Greek Church* denies the *Procession of the Holy Ghost* from the *Son*; the *Melchites* do the same; so do the *Georgians* and *Muscovites*: The *Nestorians* maintain the Heresy of *Nestorius*, averring *two Persons* as well as two Natures in our Saviour; the Christians of *St. Thomas* do the same: The *Jacobites* are *Eutichians*: The *Agyptians* *circumcise*, and give the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper to Infants: The *Abassines* *circumcise*: The *Armenians* believe as the *Greeks* about the *Procession of the Holy Ghost*, and receive Infants to the Communion: The *Maronites* do the same, and are *Monothelites*, or lately were so, till they reconciled themselves to the *Romish Church*, which I doubt has but little lessened their Errors: The *Romish Religion* is but as full of Errors, as it has Practices; their *Idolatry* and *Superstition* are as evident as their Profession of *Transubstantiation*, and all their *Divinity* but a Medley of *Nonsense* and *Absurdity*. If we look upon Protestantism, we can't but own all the *Dissenters* from the *Church of England* to be erroneous. Those of *Geneva*, *France*, and *Holland*,

think themselves Christians, tho' they have no Ministry, i. e. no Episcopacy; and consequently no Sacraments, and therefore are left to uncovenanted Mercies, which 'tis certain Christians are not. Scotland is in the same unhappy Condition. The Lutherans consubstantiate: In a word, all are in Error, but our Happy Church, thrice happy, if we can but keep in the same state we are in, and never part with the most trifling and most indifferent Ceremony or Circumstance to bring over the greatest Body of Dissenters! Heaven will be replenished with us alone; and never Pope spake so infallibly as he who paid the Complement to us, that Angli are quasi Angeli. I need not speak a Word about the Heathens or the Mahometans, which make up (if we believe Mr. Breerwood's Computation) 26 Parts of 30 of the World; of the remaining Four, all but our little Dust upon the Balance, our Drop in the Sea, are to go into everlasting Punishment, into a Place where the Fire is not quenched, and the Worm never dies. In short, Heaven is made only for a Part of England, and a much less Part too than is perhaps imagined. For the Men that would be in Charity with the Dissenters, that think they have a Right to a Toleration, as much as they have to be Protestants, the Whigs, unhappy Men, worthy of better Fate! such bad Churchmen must go — their Enemies will tell them where.

You will be ready to evade the Force of this Argument, by retorting it in some such manner as this; That Sin therefore is not damnable, because all Mankind are Sinners: For where is
the

the Difference in the Arguments, if *Damnation be the Consequence of Sin*, it will follow that *all Mankind being Sinners, all Mankind must be damned*: And, *Damnation being put as the Consequence of Error, all Mankind being under Errors, all Mankind must be damned*. Where is the Difference, you'll perhaps ask, of these Arguments, that the one is a good, the other is a bad one? But,

To this the Answer is so easy, that I shall not insist on it further, than to observe, That all Sin unrepented of is damnable; but Error cannot be repented of, because we take it to be Truth: Therefore we see all the World dies in Errors of some sort or other, never asking Pardon of or for them. But Sin is always *repented* of by every sober good Christian, whether he a *Grecian, Roman Catholick, or Protestant*; which shows that all the World agrees in a great and material Difference in the Cases. But this makes

A Fifth Argument why Error cannot be punishable, because we cannot repent of Error. I do not say a Man cannot *retract* an Error, which is some sort of *Repentance*, if you think fit to call it so: But a Man can have no Sting of *Conscience*, no *Remorse*, no *Self-condemning Notions* for having been under a Mistake, unless it has affected his Actions. For *Error* being a Mistake of the Judgment, it must direct and guide our Actions as much as *Truth* it self. Now the Sway of Truth is by directing our Actions according to our Judgment: And if that be misinformed or be misguided, the Effect must be the same, as of Truth, as flowing from the same Principle.

Now as 'tis a Contradiction to be *fully perswaded* of any Point, and to repent of it at the same time, 'twill follow that Error cannot be *repented* of. And who is there in Ten thousand, or in a great many times that Number, that doth not die in numberless Errors about one thing or other, which yet he takes to be so many real Truths? Who is there that strives to make his Peace with God for such things which he has endeavoured to free himself from, but yet continues in them, not through any Fault of his Will: Sin being *voluntary*, and our own Act, we *repent* of it, and ask God's *Pardon* for it. But Error in Judgment is not an *Action*; in that we are *Passive*, and consequently 'tis not our *own* Deed, nor imputable to *us*, more than other things, which we can neither prevent their happening, nor remedy after they have happened. Every Man may therefore say what the incomparable Mr. *Chillingworth* says, *If Men suffer themselves neither to be betrayed into their Errors, nor kept in them by any Sin of their Will; if they do their best Endeavours to free themselves from all Errors, and yet fail of thro' humane Frailty, so well am I perswaded of the Goodness of God, that if in me alone should meet a Confluence of all such Errors, of all the Protestants of the World that were thus qualified, I should not be so much afraid of them all, as I should be to ask Pardon for them. For — to ask Pardon of simple and purely involuntary Errors is tacitly to imply that God is angry with us for them, and that were to impute to him the Tyranny of requiring Brick where he gives no Straw, of expecting to gather where he strewed not, to reap where*

where he sowed not, *of being* offended with us for doing what he knows we cannot do. *Answer to the Preface, §. 26.*

For these Reasons it is, that I conclude that *simple and involuntary Error* cannot be punishable: And such must be reckoned not only Errors that have been *critically* examined by every particular Person, but such as have been searched by the Rule of common *Humane Prudence* and *Discretion*. Those must not be reckoned *voluntary* which arise from the common Springs of *Error*, (tho' these are too often reckoned such) *viz.* Authority, preconceived *Hypotheses*, or even predominant Passions themselves; much less are those to be reckoned guilty of *voluntary* Errors, who want either Abilities or Opportunities to search after Truth. Such only are *voluntary* as spring from evil Choice, and cause the Will to be evil, such as we embrace, knowing them to be Errors.

You will not, I know, admit it for Truth, without good Proof, that Errors springing from the Causes just now mentioned, are not Criminal: I shall therefore consider them distinctly, and see if there be any *Sin* or *Evil* in simple Errors so occasioned.

First then, That Simple Error is not Criminal or Punishable which springs from *Authority*. The Bulk of Mankind 'tis certain have not *Abilities* or Time sufficient to enquire after abstruse Truths, and therefore must be either entirely *ignorant*, or take up with the Notions their *Parents, Nurses, or Masters* have inculcated: Others are guided by, and see entirely with the Eyes of such whom they propose as their *Friends*.
Others

Others there are who think nothing *true*, but what is to be found amongst the Antients, and think it an infallible Note, that *Aristotle* in *Philosophick* Matters, some or other of the *Fathers* in *Religious* ones, have said it. Some resign their Minds to *Mother Church* blindly, and never enter into or examine the Reasons upon which they ground their Faith. Others take up with the *current* Opinions, and imagine Error could never spread it self so wide, and captivate such and such *great* Persons. In short, these are all to their respective Guides, just what *Sancho* was to *Don Quixote*, Squires of Knights Errant, they are fully persuaded of *Enchantments*, *Gyants* and *Adventures*, which their *Masters* dream of, they bring themselves into frequent Scrapes to justify them, and then expect the Islands or Earldoms as the Rewards of their Follies.

To shew you that the simple Errors of such are not Criminal, let it be considered, That Authority is not only a Means of Information, but is a Ground of Persuasion too in several Instances. 'Tis allowed, that in things which are not adapted to our present Capacities (such as are all the Mysteries of Religion) *Authority* is the Ground of our Belief, because no Truth is more certain, no Maxim is more evident than this, That *the God of Truth cannot, will not lye*. Now his *Authority* is grounded on his *Veracity*, and *Integrity*, and *Abilities*. In things suited to our present State, as 'tis impossible to arrive at any Knowledge of numberless Things, unless we have them from others, so their *Authority* is of just and equal Weight with their *Veracity*,
Integrity,

Integrity and Powers. If any one therefore is seduced by means of a Defect in any of the beforementioned Requisites, 'tis plain that the *Error* is not from *want of Will* to know the *Truth*, but *want of Power* to attain it. The Canal thro' which it was to pass is stopp'd, and therefore it is impossible to get at it. In Persons who cannot *Read*, 'tis evident that they must depend on others for Information in their Religion. If these are under Errors, 'tis plain they have them either from such as they receive Instruction from, or else they are the Deductions which they make from the Principles which are taught them. If the Errors are of the former sort, they are plainly *involuntary* and *necessary*, and consequently not *their own*; and to be punished for them is to be punished for other Peoples Acts. If they are their own Deductions, yet they are *involuntary*; For every Man will do his best to please God. Let a Man but take care of his *Actions*, that they are *good* and *regular*; and for his Notions, let him use but common *Prudence* and *Discretion*, and a God of infinite Goodness will not be so rigid a Taskmaster as to *require Brick without Straw* from us. Prudence and Discretion will oblige us to depend on the Authority of others, where possibly *they*, and consequently *we*, may be mistaken. To punish us for such Errors would be the same as to require us to act *imprudently* and *indiscreetly*, which a God of infinite *Wisdom* cannot expect from us. Besides either *all* Errors are Criminal which spring from *Authority*, or *none*: If you say the latter, you give up the Question at once: If the former, then 'tis cer-
tain

tain that a Means of Information, and a Ground of Persuasion, is rendered not only dangerous, but inconsistent with Prudence and Discretion. For 'twould be *imprudent* to hazard Damnation upon crediting any Body, and yet 'tis impossible to withhold Assent, when there seems to be greater degrees of Probability for what is said, than against it. If only *some* Errors, which spring from this Fountain, are Criminal, then 'tis plain that the Faultiness of them must be caused by something else besides Authority.

Secondly, Nor is that *simple Error* Criminal which proceeds from *Pre-conceived Hypotheses* or *Positions*, such as being *false* are admitted for *true*. Such Pre-conceptions being erroneous, it is in vain to expect any thing from them but Errors; and if the *Hypotheses* are not Criminal, that which flows from them directly cannot be so. He that searches after Truth ought critically to examine the Principles he goes upon, and must take care that every Step is fairly deduc'd, or else he'll quickly find that 'tis not the Light of Truth, but an *Ignis fatuus* which he pursues. 'Tis *Inadvertency* when any one takes up with Prepossessions: But then as sure as *Inadvertency* is very consistent with Sincerity, so sure it is that a God of Goodness and Justice cannot punish them when join'd together. 'Tis very possible for a Man to imagine that he sees a Connexion between two Propositions, when there really is none; as on the contrary not to perceive it where there is. *The Idea of God proves his Existence*, is a Position so far from true, that nothing seems a plainer Paralogism, and yet how many are there, who contend

tend for its Evidence, as being one of the shortest and most direct Conclusions imaginable ? And yet should an Atheist be convinced of the Being of a God, from that Argument, would any one affirm that he would be liable to Punishment for his Error ? Should any one, seduced by the Ambiguity of the Word *God*, in the Sacred Writings, maintain an *absolute Equality* of the Persons of the Ever-blessed Trinity in every respect : This would be, if I mistake not, direct *Tritheism*. Or otherwise, If any one should assert the Word *One God*, speaking of the Three Persons of the Trinity, to signify *one individual Essence or Substance* under *different Personal Characters*, this would be the Error of *Sabellius*. Should any assert either of these Notions, yet may he not act with *Honesty* and *Sincerity* ? May he not have a cordial Love for *God* and his *Christ* ? May he not be strictly *Religious*, i. e. live temperately, soberly, and godlily ? And if these are the things which *alone* are required by *God* in order to Salvation, why should we imagine that he will damn us for our Notions that are out of our Powers whether we will believe them or not ? In short, an *Hypothesis* may be receiv'd as true, which may be false ; or as false, which may be true ; without any Wilfulness, Insincerity, or Resolution to maintain it right or wrong. One may not see the Error for want of *Abilities*, or by bewildring one's self in intricate Means of discovering Truth, one may sit down with Error, and embrace a Shadow instead of a Goddess. In these, and such like Cases, if we guard against evil Practices, if we take care that our Actions

C

are

are but regular and agreeable to the Laws of
Christ, I do not see what Harm can ensue.
Therefore,

Thirdly, In Cases where there is want of *Abilities* to know an Error, or want of *Opportunity*, I need not prove that Truth is *out of our Power* to come at it, and consequently that we are *necessarily* under Error, and therefore not liable to Punishment. I'll only add,

That even predominant Passions hindering us in the Search after Truth, do not render simple Errors punishable. *Knowledge*, 'tis certain, is not more in our *Will* than *Perception* is, nor can we help assenting to what we think has the best, and clearest, and most Proofs. We cannot assent to any Truth, but such as we judge of our selves according to the Probabilities we have. If any Passion therefore predominates and weighs more with us than the coolest Reason does, we cannot but err; 'tis our *Misfortune*, 'tis our *Frailty*, 'tis our *Infirmity*, and we are unhappy in it, but not our *Fault* or *Crime*: We become the Objects of Goodness and Mercy, not of Justice or Severity. But here we must be very careful of our *Actions*, and not imagine that *Predominant Passions* will excuse wicked Actions. For Reason and Religion being given us in order to regulate our stubborn Wills, and to make us happy here, by promoting Love and Charity, and Universal Benevolence, if we suffer our Passions to take Fire, and break in upon these Duties, we become responsible to the Great Judge of all our Actions.

You

You will be apt to ask here, if no sort of Error be Criminal? Will a Man be justified before God who is guilty of *Heresy*, because, forsooth, he is *Passionate*, or because he follows a great many who have gone before him in the same Track, or because he takes up with whimsical Notions which are acknowledged Falshoods? Is not this to make a *Chaos* and Confusion amongst Mankind? Is there no Difference between erroneous Persons and others, nothing between *Orthodoxy* and *Heresy*? Is it all one, if a Man be an *Arian*, a *Socinian*, a *Macedonian*, or let him have what Notions he pleases, so they are but *Involuntary*, and do not break forth into Action?

I shall turn the Edge of this *Popular Clamour*, for I cannot allow it the Name of an *Argument*, in a few Words. As,

First, All *Voluntary* Errors are Criminal, because they are Contempts of God, who has given us Souls and Powers to search after Truth: And 'tis the Improvement of our Souls we are to mind; and *wilfully* to refuse and neglect that, is to act contrary to the Purpose of God, in vesting us with such Faculties. But what a Difference is there between this Conduct, and our falling into Errors thro' Infirmary, or by Necessity? Let Voluntary Errors therefore be as *Criminal* as you please, but then lay them to the Charge of only such as are *guilty* of them, and be very sure who are such; for remember, 'tis not your bare Charge will make them so.

Secondly, An Heretick will not be justified *because* he is *Passionate*, or because he follows a Multitude, and has great *Authorities* for his Errors,

but because his *Errors* are *involuntary*. He doth his best to rid himself of that Slavery which ties down his Mind to Error, but finds himself unable to gain the Mastery. He can say as St. Paul does, *Rom. 7. 18. To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I know not.* Where-ever it can be shewn that *Heresy* or *Schism* is a *known voluntary Act*, there to be sure 'tis *Criminal*, and no doubt that God and Man too justly may and will take cognizance of it. But when it is *involuntary*, by a Man's pursuing the Truth, *Schism* or *Heresy* is so far from being *damnable*, that I can't but think 'tis highly *commendable*; because it evidences *Honesty*, *Sincerity*, *Love of God*, and of *Truth*, and regards not the *Praise of Men*. Such Men will meet with Mercy at the Last Day from a God of Mercy, how great soever their Errors may be, because they did it *ignorantly in Unbelief*. 'Tis not the following Multitudes that excuses Men, but 'tis doing their best to know the Will of God, which takes off the Imputation of Sin and Guilt. Therefore,

Thirdly, A Man may be branded with the ignominious Characters of an *Arian*, *Sabellian*, or what you please; but if he be *honest* and *sincere*, and hath done his best to rid himself of those Notions, and yet he cannot but think them true, *i. e.* agreeable to *Revelation* and *Reason*, I can see no reason but that one Heaven may receive him, as well as it may the most Orthodox. But this will appear more clearly hereafter.

Hitherto I have consider'd *Error* abstractly, let me next consider it in the *concrete*.

All Persons under the Misfortune of Error are either,

First, Such as err in purely Speculative Matters. Or,

Secondly, Such whose Errors have *no necessary Connexion with Practice*, but yet may possibly have an Influence upon it. Or,

Thirdly, such whose Errors have a Connexion with Practice, but they do not see it. Or,

Lastly, Such as err and justify their Practical Errors.

First, Such as err in purely Speculative Matters, (I speak of Persons who have endeavoured to know the Truth, but cannot attain unto it,) such I say are as *free from Crime or Fault*, as 'tis possible for such as are *Orthodox* in those Points to be. For he that with Sincerity searches after Truth, is under a *Necessity* of *assenting* to such Propositions as seem to him to have the greatest Degree of Probability on their sides. 'Tis out of our Powers not to think that *truest* for which the strongest Arguments can be brought. Let Evidence, or the greatest Degree of Probability prevail, and give a ready Ear to that, and no Danger can ensue from God, if none doth from wicked Men. In the various Speculations concerning the Blessed *Trinity*, 'tis granted by all that they are in the Dark as to many Particulars: That where God has not revealed his Mind, 'tis *ridiculous* and *absurd* for Man to presume positively to determine. 'Tis plain too, that very *honest*, and very *sincere*, and very *pious* Men have erred, or are *suspected* to have erred in their Notions upon this Point; from whence 'tis plain that Revelation has not
clearly

clearly and distinctly laid down the things which have been so much canvass'd. Now if it be a good Principle, (and what *Protestant* is there that ever call'd it in Question?) that *the Scriptures are clear in all Fundamental Points*; then it follows, that it cannot be a Fundamental Error to recede from any Man's particular Determination *how the Three are One*. The Errors which arise about *that*, arise from want of sufficient Revelation; which Men endeavour to supply by or reconcile to *Reason*, that other Light which God has kindled in every Man's Breast, in order to enlighten his Ways. He that studies *sincerely* this or any other Point with Design to honour his Great Creator, by searching and examining what he has revealed, by endeavouring to find out what he has discover'd; in a word, he that doth his best to know his Master's Will, and to find out his Meaning, and yet errs, to dare to say that such a Man *sins*, and shall be *punished for it* hereafter, is little less than *Blasphemy*. For 'tis a consequential *Denial* of God's *Goodness* and *Justice*, to affirm him resolved to punish any Man for *involuntary Errors*, for what he knows we cannot with all our Pains and Industry attain the Knowledge of. " *To say that when a*
 " *place of Scripture, says the incomparable Mr.*
 " *Chillingworth, c. 2. §. 104. by reason of ambi-*
 " *guous Terms, lies indifferent between divers Senses,*
 " *whereof one is true, and the other is false, that God*
 " *obliges Men under the Pain of Damnation not to*
 " *mistake thro' Error and human Frailty, is to*
 " *make God a Tyrant, and to say that he requires*
 " *us certainly to attain that End, for the at-*
 " *taining whereof we have no certain Means, which*
 " *is*

“ is to say, that, like Pharaoh, he gives no Straw
 “ and requires Brick, that he reaps where he sows
 “ not, that he gathers where he strews not, that
 “ he will not be pleas'd with our utmost Endeavours
 “ to please him, without full, and exact, and never-
 “ failing Performance; that his Will is we should
 “ do what he knows we cannot do; that he will
 “ not accept of us according to that which we have,
 “ but requireth of us what we have not; which
 “ whether it consisteth with his Goodness, with his
 “ Wisdom, or with his Word, I leave it to honest
 “ Men to judge? I cannot forbear transcribing
 from him the following Instance, which is so ex-
 “ actly parallel to the Matter in hand. “ If I should
 “ send a Servant to Paris, or Rome, or Jerusalem,
 “ and he using his utmost Diligence not to mistake
 “ his Way, yet notwithstanding meeting often with
 “ such Places where the Road is divided into seve-
 “ ral Ways, whereof one is as likely to be true,
 “ and as likely to be false as any other, should at
 “ length mistake, and go out of the Way; would not
 “ any Man say, that I were an impotent, foolish,
 “ and unjust Master, if I should be offended with
 “ him for doing so? And shall we not tremble to
 “ impute that to God, which we would take in
 “ foul Scorn, if it were imputed to ourselves? Cer-
 “ tainly, I for my part fear I should not love God,
 “ if I should think so strangely of him.

For any one therefore to imagine it Zeal for
 God to persecute Men for Errors in Speculation,
 what is it but to betray an Ignorance of God and of
 his Attributes? 'Tis calling God a Tyrant, to say that
 he will punish them; and 'tis making Men the
 Devil's Agents, for them to punish them: 'Tis
 Pride,

Pride, Malice, and Uncharitableness; 'tis promoting the Power and Designs of *Satan*, and encouraging that scandalous and diabolical Vice *Hypocrisy*; 'tis suppressing *Truth* it self; 'tis putting a stop to *Industry*; in a Word 'tis *neither entring ones self, nor letting others* (as much as we can help it) *enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. When therefore I see a Man of *Pride* and *Haughtiness*, of *Insolence, Art, and Cunning*, one that *never speaks his real Sentiments*, but such things as may make an Auditory *think him* entirely in theirs; one that recommends *Concord* and *Unanimity*, and in order thereto endeavours to persuade *others* to leave off all hard Words, yet instantly rises up and uses them *himself*, fearful lest another should bear away the Prize of Elocution, or outstrip him in *Honours, Interest, or Favour*, aiming to be *Head* of a *Party*, tho' it be but of *Rebels*, and yet ever preaching against *Rebellion*; throwing out *Ill-names, Insinuations, and Reproaches* liberally upon an Adversary, for the *very things* he has been guilty of *himself*; acting always a *Double Part*; so *scrupulously* zealous for the *Glory* of God, and the Respect to be paid to the *sacred Pages*, as to imagine a *Scripture Story* profaned if put upon a *Sign*; in short, when I see a Man *ambitious*, and resolv'd to sacrifice all to please the *Party* in which he is engaged; sure I am, that one of *this* or the *like Temper* will shew a *mighty Zeal* against Error, will be ready to damn any one for an *Heretick*, tho' he understands no more of the Subject than a Horse doth, and will be for all the *Arbitrary Proceedings, and Tyrannical Persecutions*, that he can promote. Such an Haranguer will be obsti-

nate

inate in his *Opinion*, *positive*, and *confident* in what he asserts, and nothing, no, not the whole *Bench of Bishops*, should they be ready to deliver an *Opinion* contrary to his, would be able to alter the least tittle of his haughty Spirit. Were not this *Spirit of Popery* too too rise amongst *Protestants*, I had not digressed, but had sooner proceeded to the

Second Sort of Persons under Error, viz. such whose Errors have no necessary Connexion with their Practice, but yet may possibly and accidentally have an Influence upon it. As the former sort of *Erroneous* Persons were *innocent* and *free from Guilt*, so are *these*, if the *Accidents* do not happen which may influence their Actions. The *Guilt of Error* is always to be measured by the *ill Effects design'd*, or really *produced*. Whilst Error continues in the Mind, it has no other *Evil* in it than *Thought* has; which, whilst it has no *Connexion* with *Practice* is never reckoned *evil*. Should any one be firmly persuaded that God has a *Secret Will* contrary to his *Revealed Will*, the Error will not be imputed to him, unless his *Actions* are *contrary* to the *Revealed Will*. Or, in a more proper Instance; should a Man mistake the Meaning of the Word *ὁμοῦσι*, of *one Substance*, and think it means *One individual Substance*, and notwithstanding all he can do in examining and comparing Texts of Scripture, yet he continues fixed in that, as the only means of understanding how *God is One*; I see not how he would distinguish himself from some of our *Unitarians*, as they call themselves, or from the *Heresy of Sabellius*. Or suppose that one should think the *Creed*, commonly call'd of *Athanasius*, to be so agreeable to the Te-

nor of Scripture, that 'twould be inconsistent with the *true Interest* of the *Christian Religion* to have it expung'd the *Book of Common-Prayer*. These and abundant more such *Errors* have no *necessary Connexion* with *Practice*, but yet a Man may by *Accident* be influenced from these Principles in such a manner as to become *Criminal*. He may make an *unnecessary Separation*; he may be *un-charitable*; he may think it a *putting both them* that differ in Opinion from him, *and himself too, into a Gulf of Perdition, by throwing up the Essentials of Faith, and the Uniformity of Worship*, and by that means may be guilty of *enormous Actions*. These will justly fall under the Cognizance of God; and the Searcher of Hearts at the Day of Judgment will certainly *punish* such *Crimes*: But the Error it self not being attended with any *wicked Action*, but entertained with *Peace, and Love, and Charity*, and at first embraced as a real Truth after our best Endeavour to know the Truth, the *Error*, I say, under *these Circumstances* will not be *punished*.

But to confirm this to you the more, let me add this as a *Criterion*, by which we may judge of Error and its Innocency. *All such things may a Man err in safely, of which he may safely be ignorant*: For if his Salvation is not at stake by reason of his *Nescience*, supposing he masters the Truth he aims at, 'tis *superfluous Knowledge* in respect of Salvation; and therefore if he mistakes it, he mistakes about something which has no relation to his Salvation.

But you'll be apt to reply to this, that *evil Thoughts* are reckoned by our Saviour amongst the *things*

things which defile a Man. Mat. 15. 19, 20. and will certainly be punished, being certainly *sinful*. And Errors are *evil Thoughts* which injure the Soul, which exclude the Light of Truth, and consequently *defile* and pollute the Soul, and therefore must render a Man obnoxious to Punishment.

I need not stay to tell you, that by *evil Thoughts* is not meant *Erroneous ones*, but such as, if prosecuted, will produce *evil Actions*. Certain it is, that *first Motions* are not in our Powers; and God could not be said to act with *Justice*, much less with *Equity* or *Mercy*, should he punish what is not in our Powers to prevent. But if these *first Motions* (which I suppose to be of *evil Thoughts*) be indulg'd, if we take a *Pleasure* in them, 'tis evident then that we declare our *Approbation* of them, and consequently we make them *our own*, and by that means the Man is *defiled*, and will be *punish'd* for it.

Secondly, A Man may be mistaken in numberless Instances, which if he prosecutes, yet his Errors will not produce evil Actions: But then a Man cannot entertain an *evil Thought*, but if he prosecutes that, it will produce *wicked Acts*, which plainly shews a great Difference betwixt *evil* and *erroneous Thoughts*.

To strengthen this, let me add an Observation or two, *viz.* 1st. That no where in all the Scriptures do the *Apostles* or our blessed Saviour ever assert, that Men shall be punished for *Simple Errors*. 2dly. Every where, when Occasion is taken to treat of the Proceedings of the Day of Judgment, we find that our *Actions*, and *they only*, are the Subjects of Inquiry. In that we have *DONE Good or Evil*, the *WORKERS* of *Iniquity* are to be

rewarded or punished. vid. Mat. 7. 21, 23. c. 13. 41. c. 16. 27. c. 25. 31, — 46. Luke 13. 26. Jo. 5. 29. Rom. 2. 6, 7, 10, &c. From these and other Passages of the same Import, I conclude that either the Judge of Mankind, Christ, who is over All, God, blessed for evermore, has not *truly* told us the Subjects of his Inquiry at the Last Day, which would be Blasphemy to say ; or else *Errors* which do not produce *evil Actions* will not be punished. I proceed to the

Third Sort of erroneous Persons, *viz.* such whose *Errors* have a *necessary Connexion* with Practice, but yet the Connexion is not seen. However *plain* and *evident* the Consequences of them are to *others*, yet whilst they are *denied* and *avoided* as so much Poison by them who embrace the Error, such Mistake cannot but be very *innocent*. There is not a plainer Connexion between any *Principle* and its *Consequences*, than there is between a fix'd Belief of a *Fatality*, and the *Reasonableness* of running up to a loaded Cannon's Mouth ; or between a firm Persuasion of God's having *predestinated* and *elected*, or *reprobated* Men before they have done either *Good* or *Evil*, and the *Gratification* of our *Inclinations* ; and yet Numbers that steadily believe the one, will detest and abhor the other : And yet it seems very clear that if a Man be absolutely *predestinated* to Happiness, and cannot fall from Grace, what should hinder him from indulging his Appetites, or from enjoying all the Pleasures of this Life, since he cannot on any Account fail of the next ? Or in another Instance, They that maintain *Good Works* not to be *necessary* to *Salvation*, but resolve all
into

into Faith, why should not they prosecute their Pleasures, and give the Loose to their Appetites? Yet notwithstanding the seemingly evident Connexion, they would lay down their Lives rather than admit the Conclusion. The Reason of this Conduct seems to be this: They admit an Error as an indisputable Truth; or which amounts to the same in this Case, they are deceived by an ambiguous Expression of Scripture. The Principle it self they take up with is *true*, when rightly understood; and finding it in Scripture, they are positive that no Demonstration is stronger than this is; God hath said it, therefore 'tis true. But running away with the *Words*, they leave the *Meaning* behind them, and admit *Verbal Principles* (if I may call them so) instead of *Mental* ones. They therefore will deny a Consequence which they find to be inconsistent with all the other Notions of Religion which they entertain. They have the good Fortune to be kept in their respective *Duties* by other Reasons which are *clear*, and *plain*, and *positive*; and seeing the Consequences deduced from their erroneous Principles stare them so boldly in their Faces, they abominate them. Not because they really do not follow, but because they are evidently disagreeable to other Notions elsewhere imbib'd. Had all Men *Judgment* to discern *Error* from *Truth*, no one would continue under *Error*. The Firmness with which they embrace the Notions which they think are contained in the *Word* of God, shews them *Lovers* of God and of his *Christ*: It shews them *honest*, and very unwilling that Man should extort from them any *Sacred Truth*. They are ready to sacrifice

crifice their Lives to Man, in proof that with Sincerity they believe what God, they think, has revealed. They do their *best Endeavours* to know his Will, and to act according to it, and therefore *Errors* in such Persons signify no more than *no Errors*. Supposing they had had the good Fortune to believe right, they would have been but the same *good Men*, their *Practices* had been the same; and since 'tis our *Works* that will be rewarded or punished, they seem to be deserving of *greater Degrees* of Rewards, who continue *good*, notwithstanding Principles which have a necessary Connexion with *Evil*. For if one who resists the *Force of Temptation* is more *deservedly* praised than he that has had no such *Stumbling-block* laid in his Way; he that is *good* in spite of *Principle* seems to have a fairer Claim than others. But be that as it will, sure it is, that the *Errors* of such People spring not from *Choice* or *Will*, but from the Force of what they think *Scripture* and *Reason*. And if, as Mr. Chillingworth incomparably argues, “ By reason of the seeming
 “ *Conflict which is oftentimes between Scripture,*
 “ *Reason, and Authority on the one side, and*
 “ *Scripture, Reason, and Authority on the other,*
 “ *if by reason of the variety of Tempers, Abili-*
 “ *ties, Educations and unavoidable Prejudices,*
 “ *whereby Mens Understandings are variously form-*
 “ *ed and fashioned, they do embrace several Opi-*
 “ *nions, whereof some must be erroneous; to say*
 “ *that God will damn them for such Errors, who*
 “ *are Lovers of him, and Lovers of Truth, is to*
 “ *rob Man of his Comfort, and God of his Good-*
 “ *ness, is to make Man desperate, and God a Ty-*
 “ *rant.* Answer to the Preface, §. 26. The

The Fourth and last, and *only bad* sort of erroneous Persons, are such as *err*, and *practice* according to, and *justify their Practical Errors*. These 'tis certain will meet with their Deserts, the heaviest of God's just Punishments. And the Reason of it is, in such there is a *want of Honesty*, or which is worse, the actual Practice of *Dis honesty, Insincerity*, and their *Consequents*. Here is *affected Ignorance*, no desire of Information or Amendment: Here is a *Breach of clear, positive Laws*, and the Concurrence of *Will and Choice* to render it *perfect Malice*.

The *Zeal and Warmth* of some will be for loading this Fourth Article, and for bringing under these Characters all whom they think fit to damn for *Schism or Heresy*, or even such whom they *suspect* of these Crimes. Enough has been said already, I think, to satisfy an *intelligent, impartial* Person. But yet I beg leave to subjoin what will add a considerable Force to what has been already offered to you, *viz.* the Consideration of the *Obligations* all Men are under to follow their *Consciences*, even tho' they are *Erroneous*.

Agreed on all Hands it is, that a *Conscience* directed by the *Will and Word* of God, obliges a Man to act according to its Dictates. Now *Conscience* being the Judgment which every Man passes upon his Actions, as to the *Goodness or Illness* of them, the Question is only, How far a Man is obliged to act in Cases where he is mistaken in his Judgment? Now to this the Answer is easy, That a Man is obliged *always* to follow his *Judgment*, tho' 'tis *erroneous*. For,

First,

First, *Conscience* or our *Judgment* concerning our Actions, is a Power or Faculty of the Mind which God has implanted in us, on purpose to be the *Rule* of our Actions. When therefore we act in contradiction to that, our Actions are *voluntary* and *contrary* to the *Knowledge* we have of God, consequently we are guilty of *Voluntary Disobedience*, i. e. of Sin against God.

Secondly, The *Evil* of any Action is always measured and judged of by God and all good Men by the *Intention* of the *Agent*. What a Man doth necessarily is none of his Act, but so far as he *concurs*, *consents*, and *wills* any Action, so far is he the *Agent*. In an Action therefore committed against *Conscience*, the *Will* being supposed entirely to concur, the *Agent* must necessarily be *dishonest*, *insincere*, and consequently guilty of a Vice.

Or thus: That is the perpetual *Rule* of all our *Actions*, which if we follow, we are reckon'd *honest*; if we do not, we are reckon'd *dishonest*: Now such is *Conscience*. We are *honest* if we follow and practice *Virtue*, known to us to be *Virtue*; as likewise if we hate *Vice*, known to us to be such. Now *Conscience* being our *Guide* or *Rule*, and *Villany* and *Hypocrisy* being the swerving from it, acting against *Conscience* must be *Villany*. Should a *Jew* pretend to turn *Christian*, and offer himself at the *Font* for *Baptism*, and yet not believe *Christ* to be come, nor any thing of *Christianity*, every one would justly detest his *Hypocrisy* and *Roguery*, which is justly imputable to him for acting contrary to his *Conscience*.

Thirdly, The Sacred Pages justify the same Doctrine, telling us, *Rom. 14. 23. Whatsoever is not*

not of Faith is Sin. St. Paul is plainly asserting that to be *Sin* which proceeds not from a *firm and full Persuasion* of Mind, that it is *lawful* and *agreeable* to the *Will* of God. Now whatsoever is *contrary* to *Conscience*, is *contrary* to *such a Persuasion*. Nay, St. Paul carries this much further in the former part of the Verse, *He that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of Faith.* And if he that *doubteth* is liable to Punishment, because he doth a thing which he knows not whether it be *lawful* or not, much more doth he *Sin* who acts contrary to *Faith* and full *Persuasion* of Mind.

Obj. You'll say perhaps, notwithstanding all this and more which may be urged, that a Man's *Conscience* cannot be the *Rule* of his Actions, because a *Rule* must always be *right* and *strait*; but *Conscience* very often swerves from *Straitness* by Errors. Therefore some other *Rule*, even the *Rule* of *Conscience* it self, should be our Guide.

A. This would be just arguing, if it did not imply an *Impossibility*. The *Word* of God is our *Rule of Conscience*, and all Men, no question, who know it to be the *Word* of God, are ready to submit their *Judgments* to it. But then he who lies under an *erroneous Conscience*, either *knows* the *Will* of God, or doth *not*: If he *knows* it, how is he *erroneous*? If he doth not know it, 'tis impossible for that to be his *Guide* or *Rule*.

You'll say a Man ought in such Circumstances to *suspend* his Actions, that is, A Man may *suspend* when his *Conscience* tells him that he may *lawfully*, *justly*, and *safely* do an Action, which is but little different from a Contradiction.

But what must a Man do in such unhappy *Circumstances*, when the *Laws* of God are contrary to one's *Conscience*?

This can be no Question where the *Laws* of God are *known* and *understood*; for 'tis impossible for any one not to guide himself by that Rule, when he knows that God has determined the Point. But when a Man breaks the *Laws* of God, *not known or understood*, by following his erroneous *Conscience*, I can't but think him *less guilty* before God than he would be, were he to observe the *Laws* of God, but yet act *against his Conscience* in so doing. This perhaps may seem a Paradox; but yet if one may determine between two Sins, which is the *worst*, one may by the same Rules determine this Matter. As,

First, That *Crime* is the *worst* which is committed with the *basest*, *most villainous*, and *most dishonest Mind* and *Intention*: But he that acts with an *erring Conscience* against the *unknown or not understood Will* of God, acts with the *most sincere* and *honest Mind*; therefore to follow one's *Conscience* in such Cases, even *against* the *Will* of God, is the *lesser Crime*. 2dly, The *Evil* of any Action is not to be judged of from the *Fact* it self, but from the *Circumstances* attending it. Every *Killing* of a Man is not *Murder*; nor is every *Falshood* a *Lye*; nor is every sort of *taking away* another Man's Goods *Theft* and *Robbery*. If *Killing* a Man considered only as to the *Fact* was *Malum per se*, then 'twas absolutely impossible that God should ever have commanded *Abraham* to slay his Son *Isaac*, because God would have commanded the Performance of an Act absolutely inconsistent with his Goodness, which would be a Contradiction. We find too, that God himself *excused* even the *Killing* of a Man, if it were done thro' *Ignorance*: But the *Soul* that doth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that *Soul* shall be cut off from amongst his People. Numb. 15. 30. 'Tis then *Murder*, when *knowingly* and *designedly*, not by Law, we take away the Life of a Man: 'Tis *Theft* when we design the depriving another of what is his own, and illegally execute

ecute our Designs; and so of other Sins. Facts therefore done thro' *perfect Error* and *Ignorance* being always less Criminal than such as are done with *Design*, 'tis evident that Conscience is to be followed, and he is guilty of the least Crimes who recedes the least from that. Lastly, The Man that acts *against* his Conscience offends against God more than he that *ignorantly* breaks the Laws of God; because whoever owns the Being of a God, cannot but believe his Judgment and Conscience acceptable to God: If he did not, without doubt he would change it for what he thought was acceptable to him. Now he that acts against his Conscience must *knowingly* and *wittingly* do what he thinks *displeasing* to God: Now 'tis plain that this must be *more Criminal* than to do a thing displeasing to God *ignorantly* and *accidentally*, as much as it is more a Fault to do a thing *presumptuously* than not. And this is the Reason which God himself in the *Mosaic Law* assigns for the Difference between Sinners that sin *ignorantly*, and such as sin *with an high Hand*, because (speaking of the presumptuous one) *he hath despis'd the Word of the Lord, and hath broken his Commandments.* Numb. 15. 31.

Will an *erroneous Conscience* therefore excuse all Faults? Or will he that follows that be free from the Imputation of Sin? Will *Error like Charity cover the multitude of Sins*? Or in what consists the Crime of Erroneous Persons?

The Crime, I think, consists in the *Negligence* of such as are betrayed into Error. Which *Negligence* is more or less *punishable*, as the Will of God has been plainer or more obscurely discoverable by Men. *Punishable*, I say, but not by *Man*, unless the Errors betray them into such Acts as are inconsistent with the *Civil Interests* of Mankind. For since the Fault lies only in *Negligence*, what Man alive can tell what Industry, Pains, or Labour has been used to obtain the Truth? God, the *Searcher of Hearts* can easily discover this; and therefore we are assured, *Rom. 1. 20.* that *the Gentiles* are without excuse for their Follies and Sins in Idolatry, *because*

that which may be known of God is manifest in or to them, — for the invisible things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his Eternal Power and Godhead, so that they are without Excuse.

But then if the Fault of Negligence be removed, if Diligence and Industry be applied, and yet the Error be unsurmountable, 'tis plain the Error is *Involuntary*, 'tis necessary, because out of our Power to remove it; and therefore the Persons under Mistake are as free from Crime, or the Imputation of it, as *Innocent* or *Orthodox* Persons are, and I see not how God could either be Good or Just, if he laid it to their Charge. Where-ever there is Crime there must be Will in Sins of Commission, or Negligence in Sins of Omission. He that follows an *erroneous Conscience* may be guilty of the one or the other: But if he has neither Negligence and Ignorance affected, nor Wilfulness, he cannot have any Crime.

'Tis time now to look back, and to view the Ground we stand upon: 'Tis evident, I believe, that *simple Errors* are not punishable, let them spring from what Source they will. 2dly, That *Errors* in purely *Speculative* Matters are not punishable, Nor 3dly, Such Errors as have only *accidental Connexions* with Practice. Nor 4thly, Such Errors as have a *necessary Connexion*, but yet the Connexion is not seen nor own'd. The only punishable Errors are such as are *voluntary*, or proceed from *Negligence*. Lastly, It has been prov'd that an *erroneous Conscience* obliges us to follow its Dictates, and that 'tis a *lesser Crime* to break the Laws of God *ignorantly* than to act against one's Conscience.

Let me now a little touch those *Theological Scarecrows*, as they are commonly used, and as Mr. Hales in his unanswerable *Treat of Schism* calls them, *Heresy* and *Schism*. From what has been said it follows that That *Heresy* cannot be damnable, which consists in *pure speculative Matters*; nor such as consists in *simple Errors*; nor such as consists in Points which have only *accidental* or *necessary Connexion* not seen or owned with Practice;

Practice; because in all these Cases *Error* is not *punishable*. It cannot be Criminal, unless it proceeds from *Negligence* in searching after the Will of God, and enquiring into his Laws, or else from Wilfulness. For if a great deal of Pains and Care has been used to know the Mind of God, and yet we cannot obtain it, 'tis not our *Fault*, and consequently we cannot be chargeable: " For if God, says Mr. Chillingworth, would have had his
 " Meaning in these places certainly known, how could it
 " stand with his Wisdom to be so wanting to his own
 " Will and End as to speak obscurely? Or how can it
 " consist with his Justice to require of Men to know cer-
 " tainly the meaning of those Words, which he himself
 " hath not revealed? Suppose there were an absolute
 " Monarch that in his own Absence from one of his King-
 " doms, had written Laws for the Government of it,
 " some very plainly, and some very ambiguously and
 " obscurely, and his Subjects should keep those that were
 " plainly written with all Exactness; and for those that
 " were obscure, use their best Diligence to find his
 " Meaning in them, and obey them according to the Sense
 " of them which they conceive; should this King either
 " with Justice or Wisdom be offended with these Subjects,
 " if by reason of the Obscurity of them, they mistook
 " the Sense of them, and fail of Performance by reason of
 " their Error? c. 2. §. 127.

To make therefore *Heresy punishable*, it must first be proved *Criminal*, and to do that it must be proved *Voluntary*, or to proceed from *Negligence*. And then the Definition of it must be, not, as 'tis usually put for *An Error in Fundamentals*, but something else. However when once Men are agreed upon what are *Fundamentals*, and lay aside *human Deductions*; as certainly *Non-Fundamentals*, sure it is that a great many Notions to serve a Party frequently called *Heresies*, will be blotted out of the Catalogue. A *Heretick* that is *Punishable* is one that professes *Doctrines* which he knows to be false, in order to lead Men into Practices which he knows to be wicked. God and Man may punish such, consistent with

with *Goodness, Justice, and Mercy*; and every Man is obliged to follow the Apostle's Rules concerning Hereticks, Tit. 3. 10, 11. *A Man that is an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.* For surely such an Heretick as is before mentioned, who will presume to teach such *Doctrines* and such *Practices*, has all the Characters which the Apostle gives; he is *subverted*, he *sins*, he is *self-condemned*: But that which generally bears the Name of Heresy, viz. *An Error in some Speculations about the blessed Trinity*, or such *Mysteries of Christianity* will hardly be found to have above one of the three Characters the Apostle gives of an *Heretick*. If he be *subverted*, yet 'twill be hard to prove *Sin* or *Self-Condensation* upon a Man. In short, *Heresy* is not an *Error of the Understanding*, but of the *Will*. If Errors of the *Understanding* are *Criminal*, let *All* be so, and punish *Philosophical* ones as well as *Theological*, and take into the Account *all others* too, and let him that is without *Sin* among you cast the first Stone. If this seems shocking, give but a good Reason why *Theological Errors of the Understanding* alone must be *sinful* and liable to Punishments, and I'll venture to promise to prove *others* to be under the same Predicament. If you say that Heresy is an Error of the *Will*, then tell me why the Man that impartially studies the Scriptures, and differs in his Notions from the received *Hypotheses* in some *mysterious speculative* Matters, is branded with the ignominious Character of Heretick? 'Tis surprizing therefore that a professed Opinion, accompanied with Charity and good Nature, should become more Criminal in some Mens Minds than even a wicked Life. If it were in my Choice to appear before the great Searcher of Hearts in what manner I would, except it be that of Innocence or sincere Repentance, I would rather appear with a thousand Errors, and what some call *Heresies*, about me, if they were such as proceeded from real Judgment, after all my Industry to search out Truth, and to know the Will of

of God, than to appear as one who has been ever *Drunk*, *Profane*, or has ever led an immoral Life. And yet how lightly are these passed over, and an *innocent erroneous* Person, or perhaps but *suspected* of Error, how terribly is he hamper'd, persecuted and worried? " *Antiently*, says " *Mr. Hales* in his Sermon upon Rom. 14. 1. *Heretical* " *and Orthodox Christians many times even in publick* " *holy Exercise conversed together without Offence.* " *It is noted in the Ecclesiastick Stories, that the Arians* " *and Right Believers so communicated together in ho-* " *ly Prayers, that you could not distinguish them till* " *they came to the Δοξολογία, the Gloria Patri, which* " *the Arians used with some Difference from other Chri-* " *stians. But those were times, quorum lectionem ha-* " *bemus, virtutem non habemus.* We read of them in " *our Books, but we have lost the Practice of their Pa-* " *tience. And presently afterwards, " SEVERITY* " *against, and SEPARATION from Heretical Com-* " *panies took its Beginning from the Hereticks themselves.* Whence is it that *Orthodox* Persons are so ready to follow the evil Example of *Hereticks*, and what is more, the very *worst part* of their Example? Whence is it that they so readily embrace the Means which were invented by *erroneous* Persons, to carry on a wrong Cause? Or if we will consult Experience, that will tell us, that since the time when *Force* and temporal Pnnishments were first used to propagate Notions, it has been *ten* Times, I might say *Ten thousand* Times, used to propagate *Errors* instead of *once* to propagate *Truth*.

As to *Schism*, I shall only add, that from what has been said, nothing can be inferr'd that will encourage it. I refer you to *Mr. Hales's* incomparable Tract upon that Subject. If any *Dissenter* thinks to justify himself from what has been said, or upon the Principles laid down in that Treatise, there will not be wanting who will defend *Mr. Hales*, and who will prove the *Un-réasonableness* of Separation from the Church of England, very consistently with the Principles here laid down.

If you, Sir, should think fit to make a publick Reply to what is here offer'd, I know you are too much a Gentleman to carp at *Words*, or let go my *Meaning*; you have too much *sence* to embrace a *Shadow* instead of the *Substance*. I persuade my self that you will believe me when I assure you, that I love a *Truth* for *Truth's* sake, and am overjoy'd when I find it, though it makes against me. I only allot to Truth, the first Place in my Heart; next to that, you have the Pre-eminence in,

SIR,

December

11. 1714.

Your most obedient Servant.

F I N I S.

